

SONORAN DESERT NATIONAL MONUMENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Sonoran Desert National Monument was designated by Presidential Proclamation on January 17, 2001, for the purpose of protecting the objects described in the Proclamation. Those objects include, but are not limited to, the flora and fauna of the monument as well as the cultural, historic and geologic features on the monument.

The Sonoran Desert National Monument is in south central Arizona, approximately 60 miles southwest Phoenix. The outer boundaries of the area encompass approximately 496,337 acres of land, of which 486,603 acres are BLM-administered public land. The Sonoran Desert as a whole is the most biologically diverse of the North American deserts; the monument captures a significant portion of that diversity. Unique woodland assemblages occur on some of the higher peaks, while much of the lower elevation lands have some of the most structurally complex examples of the palo verde/mixed cacti plant community in the Sonoran Desert. These dense stands of cacti and leguminous trees are dominated by saguaro, prickly pear and cholla cacti and palo-verde and ironwood trees. The saguaro cactus forests are the most striking aspect of the flora within the monument. The monument's plant communities are habitat for a wide diversity of wildlife, including desert tortoise, desert bighorn sheep, mule and white-tailed deer, mountain lion, and many avian, reptile and amphibian and other mammalian species. The monument contains all or parts of three distinct mountain ranges, the Maricopa Mountains, the Sand Tank Mountains and the Table Top Mountains, as well as the Booth Hills and White Hills. These mountain ranges are separated by wide valleys.

The monument also contains many significant archaeological and historic sites, including rock art sites, lithic quarries, scattered artifacts, and the remains of early 20th century ranches and homes. Vekol Valley is believed to have been an important prehistoric travel and trade corridor between the Hohokam along the Salt River and tribes located in what is now Mexico. The monument also contains 16 miles of a much used trail corridor in which are found remnants of several important historic trails, including the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, the Mormon Battalion Trail, and the Butterfield Overland Stage Route.

The monument includes three designated wilderness areas, the North Maricopa Mountains, South Maricopa Mountains, and Table Top. It also contains the Vekol Valley Grassland Area of Critical Environmental Concern and a 77,957 acre area known as Area A or the Sand Tank Mountains that was part of the Barry M. Goldwater Range until 2001.

The BLM is currently developing a Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the monument. The RMP will guide the BLM in managing the monument for the next 15 to 20 years. A companion RMP is being developed to address management of other public lands outside the monument. Significant issues to be addressed in the monument RMP include management of natural and cultural resources, allocation of appropriate uses such as utility corridors, off-highway vehicle use and route designation, livestock grazing, recreation use in many forms, wildlife waters, and, perhaps most significant, urban encroachment. Maricopa County was the fastest growing large county in the United States in 2003, and it appears that rapid growth is continuing in 2005. Pinal County is also experiencing similar population growth. The Phoenix metropolitan area is now the fifth largest metropolitan area in the United States and is experiencing meteoric growth. It is expected to attain a population of 6.5 million people over the next 20 years. The towns of Gila Bend, Buckeye and Goodyear already either abut or nearly abut the monument's boundaries. They, as well as other communities around the monument, are experiencing growth similar to the greater Phoenix area. This population growth is already being seen on the monument through increased recreation use. The BLM anticipates that recreation visits to the monument will grow from approximately 20,000 per year today to over 100,000 per year by 2015.

It is the BLM's challenge, and opportunity, to manage the Sonoran Desert National Monument in the context of that growth, to fulfill the purpose of the monument as described in the Proclamation while accommodating to the extent practicable the increase in recreational use that is expected to occur. To help meet that challenge, the BLM is forming the Sonoran Desert National Monument Advisory Council. The BLM believes that citizen involvement is essential to meeting that challenge; the Advisory Council is an important way to assure that involvement.

Additional information about the Sonoran Desert National Monument and the Advisory Council can be found at <http://www.az.blm.gov/sonoran/council.htm>.